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Critical Disability Studies

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Thinking with Jina B. Kim and Sami Schalk

Julie Avril Minich

ABSTRACT

It is an honor and a privilege to read these careful and insightful responses to my provocation by Jina B. Kim and Sami Schalk, two intellectuals whose body of work, in my estimation, demonstrates exactly the kind of critical engagement I had in mind when I proposed the idea of critical disability studies as methodology rather than subject. What is particularly rewarding about reading these responses together is noting how Kim draws on figures often aligned with ethnic studies (Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cathy Cohen) to elucidate how disability studies already functions as methodology in their work, while Schalk engages with crip theorists (Robert McRuer, Alison Kafer) whose work has provided the model for the approach I wanted to advocate. Asserting that my formulation of disability studies as methodology points to the importance of coalition among (apparently) disparate social and intellectual movements, Kim also asks readers of my initial essay not to stop at celebrating the possibility of such coalition but to actively imagine what it might entail. As a model, she offers brief but insightful readings of Lorde and Anzaldúa. She ends by addressing my call to consider disability studies as a pedagogical methodology and extends this call by reminding readers of the many (and damaging) forms that scholarly labor can take, suggesting that one way to push my argument is to consider the possibility that a critical disability methodology must also entail an embrace of the "slow professor" movement and resistance to institutional demands for scholarly "productivity." Meanwhile, Schalk addresses the power and importance of language by proposing that the methodology I propose might require a new critical lexicon. In particular, Schalk offers an especially helpful distinction between (dis)ability ("a system of social norms which categorizes, ranks, and values bodyminds") and disability ("a historically and culturally variable category within this larger system"). She points to the contradictory rhetorical uses of disability and ability to justify slavery in order to pinpoint the urgency of a term like (dis)ability. Additionally, she proposes that if disability studies is to embrace a specific pedagogical methodology, this must encompass not only the mode of instruction, as I initially suggested, but also the conceptual work being done in the classroom. We must, in other words, not just teach our students about disability and disabled people but seek to disrupt the ways in which they navigate systems of (dis)ability. What I particularly appreciate about both engagements is how seriously they took my proposition: Rather than simply accepting my proposition, they remind us that the ethical value (or lack thereof) in a disability studies methodology will lie in the form that methodology takes.



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Julie Avril Minich is Assistant Professor of English, Mexican American & Latina/o Studies, and Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, where she teaches courses in U.S. Latina/o literary and cultural studies, disability studies, and feminist/LGBT studies. Minich is author of the book *Accessible Citizenships: Disability, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico* (Temple UP, 2014), winner of the 2013-2014 MLA Prize in United States Latina and Latino and Chicana and Chicano Literary and Cultural Studies. Additionally, she has articles published or forthcoming in journals such as *GLQ*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, *MELUS*, and the *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, as well as in several anthologies. She is currently working on a new book about U.S. Latina/o literature, compulsory able-bodiedness, and the racialization of health, which is tentatively titled *Enforceable Care: Health, Justice, and Latina/o Expressive Culture*.



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